



## *Messianic Fellowships—“Messy” expectations & Disappointment*

Part 1

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As anyone who has been a Messianic Believer for very long knows, there is an amazing swell of people who are hearing from the Ruach and coming into Torah pursuance through Messiah! Fulfillment of prophecy in our day!

What they may also know too well, sadly, is that there is a strong pattern in these fellowships of coming together in joyful anticipation only to crash and burn on the shores of that hope of something new and enduring. Many came from disappointing or harmful experiences in their previous faith community. If someone goes through more than one of these fragmentations of Messianic fellowships too, there is a resulting disillusionment, fear and reluctance to try again. They may understandably come to believe that it is impossible to grow in covenant relationships and safer to just keep fellow believers at arm's length. These concerns have been addressed in various ways through the articles on our website. There is still more to say. This two part series will deal with expectations and the disappointment of unmet expectations; drawing the connection with failed attempts at Torah pursuant fellowship.

A recent visitor to our newer mini site, [www.plantandgrowmessianicfellowships.org](http://www.plantandgrowmessianicfellowships.org), (which is not incorporated into THIS site) also went and read some of our articles on the SAM site, too. We are glad that she recognized some help, but sad once again to see confirmation of these struggles. She had this to say:

*It is a breath of fresh air to have an organized approach as to involvement in community!  
My husband and I have experienced many congregations fall apart due to lack of  
understanding on the role(s) responsibilities, and participation required to make a  
congregation work.*

*We have hosted many home (Unfortunately) socialships, in the hopes of having "fellowship.*

*They were always Biblically based, but somehow they never got any further. We have had a few people come up to us and ask if we were going to be "doing this" or that for the Holydays. It really seems to be more of a social event than anything. I have refused to do anything more for the past year, and we even went out of the area for Sukkot. We have been aware of and supportive of the work Dean and Susan Wheelock have done, and so we thought it would be nice to meet them after all these years. It was wonderful to be around believers who wanted to learn! I am not sure where we stand at the moment as far as hosting Bible studies in our home. My husband doesn't seem too interested in the responsibility that is entailed with any form of commitment.*

Any time there is a group of people coming together, there will also be a group of expectations, both spoken and unspoken. As people who have been strong enough in their faith to step away from the institutional fabric of their churches they must by default also be people of some determination and will. Each will have some set of expectations of what REALLY should be happening for people of faith.

Here is a personal example kindly provided by one Messianic fellowship leader:

*I will share with you my personal experiences with Expectations and Disappointment within the Messianic Communities of Believers. For Sukkot 2009, we were one of five families who desired to provide a local site for Sukkot at a teen youth camp in the southern part of Indiana. My husband and I wanted to see more unity within this assembly during Sukkot. However, before Sukkot, my husband perceived that the Spirit of Yahweh desired repentance and humility within the body of believers so he taught on Hosea 6. This teaching was not well received because of the expectations that the other believers had brought to the Sukkot gathering. A critical spirit then attacked the leaders of the five families so, rather than unifying, the camps were split into two sections.*

*The result of this split was that the leadership was attacked, the monthly Sabbath gatherings were disbanded, and there was new leadership in the group of Messianic believers located around that ...city.*

It is not wrong to have expectations! A group can't exist without some expectations. What goes wrong here is that they are too often unspoken or assumed, leading to confusion and disappointment and falling apart. A group that hasn't established a firm identity or boundaries and leadership structure is a ripe place for unspoken expectations to thrive. Over the course of time different events will bring some of these expectations to the surface and people will interpret the events according to what they believe, whether or not they know if others share their understanding. Without clear leadership or boundaries there is no way to establish a way to work through the differences. The emotions involved usually make it difficult for calmer

heads to prevail. Our *Drama Triangle for Messianic Communities* audio teaching covers a lot of ground to help further understand the dynamics playing out in such a situation.

Sometimes people want to interpret this as a good thing: part of YHWH's plan to spread the seed of the Word. At Set Apart Ministries, we see a clear difference between groups that “**fall out**” and those that “**send out**.” A **falling out** carries with it all the frustrations of previous failed efforts as well as unresolved emotional conflicts. We believe that there is also a spiritual root and hindrance that will then find its way into their newly formed group, planting the seeds of failure before it can even really grow. A **sending out** is a joyful occasion in which a strong group chooses to share their resources and people in forming a new group.

We advocate several things to address expectations. It is important to understand what kind of community is being formed or what stage an existing community is in. These matters are discussed in our teaching on *The Importance of Echad in Community* and briefly described in our mini site, Plant and Grow Messianic Fellowships. [www.plantandgrowmessianicfellowships.org](http://www.plantandgrowmessianicfellowships.org)

We practice and teach the need for personal maturity individually and corporately in order to be able to bring those unspoken expectations into the light. Our community motto, or one of them anyway, is “Pray, stay, don't run away.” Sadly, even when this is a focus, there is still opportunity for disruption. The difference is that the remaining core group can learn and grow even when there has been a falling out, or what is commonly called a split. Without awareness of the process and expectations this **falling out** seems like a “**falling apart**” and leaves everyone feeling unsettled, uncomfortable and maybe even frightened. With awareness, there is grief but not the type of “**falling apart**” that is otherwise common.

I might also add here that there are people who have not learned and WILL NOT learn how to work together in community under leadership. It may be due to severe trauma, personality traits, immaturity, demonization or simply contrary behavior. It is especially difficult to identify when this is a passive-aggressive kind of subtle resistance that can be quietly undermining authority over long periods of time. In all humility, perhaps we need to remember that YHWH and Moshe both referred to Israelites as “stiff-necked” and “rebellious” so maybe this is one part of our identity??? In any event, He did not leave them that way but worked with them to come to the place of yieldedness to Him. This is a sort of model for shepherds today, though filled with challenges. Humans are NOT THE GREAT Shepherd! We are fallible. Some of these challenges are addressed in my series on *What Shepherds Need to Know*. It is not YHWH honoring to be controlling and authoritarian with the flock but neither is it YHWH honoring to be negligent and fail to cover them in appropriate ways.

Sometimes it seems, too, that people who demand a great deal from shepherd leaders—expectation of lots of personal attention—have difficulty discerning when this is truly necessary and life giving or when it becomes inappropriate. In such cases, shepherd leaders may almost

be captive to their demands and need to know when/how to set boundaries. Such people generally do not like having boundaries set and often leave. A community needs to know what to expect in this kind of situation too, so that sides are not taken and a polarization of who is right and who is wrong happens. It is a cue to watch for when the focus of concerns comes away from serving Messiah and turns to personal attack on a leader. The difficulty of knowing the heart of the leader, and whether or not what is of concern is a genuine problem or not has split many communities. It doesn't have to be this way when solid YHWH honoring relationships have been developed over time by working through identifying and processing expectations.

When people first come together their focus is generally on the Word and Scriptural understanding of our Elohim and all His ways from this "new" Hebraic viewpoint. This is all for good! Unfortunately, many think that this is all that is necessary. If they are looking to Messiah, all things will fall into place and their group will grow and prosper. Again, unfortunately, not all people are equally well equipped or mature enough to clearly hear from the Ruach at all times! Have you yet heard of a group that sits down to discuss all that they expect from one another, whether or not there will be a leader, what kind of authority they are willing to grant and honor, or not, how they define themselves and so forth BEFORE they begin a topical study or Torah portion commentary? This almost seems impossible, because many people can't easily even recognize or articulate what their expectations ARE. They just know when they **haven't** been met!

They concentrate on the content of the Word and generally completely neglect to address the process of relationships and group development that goes into strong, stable foundations. Messiah spent three years with the disciples, training them not only in content of the Word but also in how to relate to one another. How many shepherd leaders have had such an opportunity before taking on a group? How many are willing to take the time to learn relationship skills as well as growing deeper in Scriptural understanding? One such shepherd wrote to me: "People don't want to learn how to swim until they are drowning." When we are thinking clearly it is easy to see that learning to swim while drowning isn't exactly ideal!

Neither is it wise to try to learn everything there is to know about leading people just from your own experience. There is much to be gained by learning from one another!

A powerful factor in disappointment has just recently come to my attention. Any one in leadership will recognize that there is a difference between being "**disappointed for**" someone and being "**disappointed in**" someone. Just as some expectations affect the way people treat one another so do some expectations affect the way leaders see the people. No one will always be able to respond as someone else expects! It is normal to drop the proverbial ball once in a while and this should not be given any more weight than it deserves! However, a different

story emerges when expectations are routinely unmet over time. Here patterns emerge that affect everyone.

To be **disappointed for** someone involves seeing that there are things they need to know and act on, but that they are falling off the path routinely. This disappointment involves concern for the person and the consequences of their choices. It is painful and difficult for a shepherd and for me, anyway, always requires self-examination as to whether I bear any responsibility for misleading or failing to lead well. This type of disappointment is most appropriate when it is rooted in understanding of the spiritual disciplines that are an important part of growing in Messiah honoring Torah pursuance. As such, it is rooted in having one's eyes on Messiah's interests in each person.

To be **disappointed in** someone is less clear and more difficult. Again, a leader shepherd needs to be mature enough to realize that no one can meet every expectation they have, just as shepherd leaders cannot always meet people's expectations. When disappointments happen over time, and especially for more than one person at a time, a leader shepherd can see not only the personal losses sustained but also the corporate loss sustained by a community that cannot depend on its members. How does a shepherd leader respond to:

- One who was given room and latitude to grow who fails to show growth?
- One who continually draws attention to themselves through emotional outbursts or Monopolizing people despite frequent expressions of concern and redirection?
- One who frequently behaves disrespectfully to others despite personal confrontation?
- One who consistently fails to follow through on plans previously agreed to?
- One who is constantly questioning the motives of those in leadership?

In short, how do most shepherd leaders respond when they see people who are not contributing to the well-being of the community and in fact, even detracting from it? What is our expectation of the appropriate way to handle such situations?

We hear again from the leader who wrote of people's expectations being difficult for Sukkot of 2009 now experiencing the other end of it, too:

*Just prior to Sukkot of 2010, we experienced the same frustration of our expectations not being met. One of the Christian women that had been in our Torah group came against us. What we were sharing about the Torah and obeying the commandments of Yahweh did not line up with the theology she had been taught in the church. She said she wanted to follow the truth but did not want to believe that she had been deceived by the pastors /teachers she had listened to all her life. She did not want to celebrate Sukkot with us and*

*was very resistant to keep Shabbat. It was very disappointing since I so wanted her to hear more of the truth found in the Torah and to learn more about the Creation Gospel. The Torah has become our life and we want to share it with others. Many Christians simply do not want to believe anything other than what they have been taught. I am disappointed for them since they do not want to know more about their Bridegroom, His customs and His moedim, which we will celebrate in His Kingdom when He returns for His Bride.*

I imagine that every reader who has been involved in Messianic community can identify with this kind of situation!

Though we know our model is Messiah, Who was never surprised because He knows what is in man, we fall into the trap of having had high hopes for someone, only to see them fall. It is easy for our human expectations to get mixed up with our Godly expectations.

People may not have considered that there is a difference between disappointed for and disappointed in another. This contributes to an entirely unexpected response!

Do you recognize these behaviors? I'd be delighted to talk them over with you if any help is needed.

Watching and praying,

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